

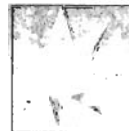


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# Daily News

## WEATHER



**Mostly sunny**  
**Highs: 68-72**  
**Lows: 38-44**  
**Air quality:**  
Good

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# Quality of life erodes

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report

## Annual report card on Southland full of grim news

**By Kerry Cavanaugh**  
*Staff Writer*

The quality of life across the six-county Southern California region has slipped, with smog, traffic, job opportunities and income levels getting worse and housing and education staying just above passing,

a report released Thursday says.

The annual report card from the Southern California Association of Governments saw no improvement in any of the seven areas it graded based on data for 2002.

And SCAG warned that there was little hope for early improvement, with

traffic, education, air quality and even public safety likely to suffer because of the state's financial crisis and harsh cuts expected in public spending. Transportation funding also is on the chopping block in Sacramento, and the SCAG region faces a \$4.3 billion shortfall for road and transit projects.

Local officials acknowledged that the picture the grades painted was grim, but said it could brighten in the future as an improving economy generates more jobs and raises income.

"Probably the report next year will be

Please see **LIFE** / Page 14



► Do you think life is  
getting worse in  
Southern California?  
**See Page 2**

# Quality of life down in SoCal

LIFE / From Page 1

somewhat comparable, if not maybe even a little bit worse, than this year's. Then we'll start to see it get better just as we start to see the economy getting better," said Bev Perry, the president of SCAG and a Brea City Council member.

The report said the national recession helped drag down employment and income grades, already horrendous traffic congestion just got worse, and an increase in the number of smoggy days caused air quality to slip from a B-minus to a C.

More cars on the road and more congestion translates to even more air pollution for residents. Even worse, the SCAG region — Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange and Imperial counties — could lose an additional \$8 billion in federal transportation funding if it fails to meet clean-air goals.

Said Perry: "People are going to be faced with a choice of, Are

## STATE OF THE REGION

Based on seven key indicators, the quality of life largely declined in 2002 in the region that encompasses Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, Riverside, Imperial and San Bernardino counties.

SECTOR	CONDITION	GRADE			
Employment	The region lost 22,000 jobs, the first decline since the end of the last recession in 1993. Unemployment rose from 5.1 to 6.1 percent, above the national average of 5.8 percent. However, the government, health care and teaching sectors added jobs.	1998 B-	1999 A-	2000 B+	2001 B
		2002 B-			
Income	Per-capita income was \$30,256, below the national average of \$30,308, a troubling trend because it generally costs more to live in urban areas.	1998 C+	1999 C+	2000 C	2001 C
		2002 C-			
Housing	The region issued building permits for 68,000 units, the most since 1990. Despite low interest rates, fewer than one-third of the region's households could afford the median-priced home (\$300,000). Among renters, more than half paid more than the recommended 30 percent of their income on rent.	1998 C	1999 C	2000 C	2001 D+
		2002 D+			
Mobility	Traffic congestion continued to worsen. Motorists in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties suffered through 52 hours of delay in 2001, and those in San Bernardino and Riverside experienced 34 hours of delay. Mass transit saw a 6 percent jump in boardings, but carpooling declined 1.3 percent.	1998 D	1999 D	2000 D	2001 D
		2002 D-			
Air Quality	Ozone pollution worsened, and there were more days when health advisories were posted. Santa Clarita had 32 days when the air was worse than the national health standard, more than any other region in the country.	1998 C	1999 B-	2000 B	2001 B-
		2002 C			
Education	Except for students in Orange and Ventura counties, eighth-graders performed below national average on reading and math tests. Fewer than 40 percent of the region's graduates completed the coursework required to get into the UC or CSU systems.	1998 D	1999 D	2000 D	2001 D
		2002 D			
Safety	Violent crime decreased slightly from 2001 to 2002. Juvenile felony arrests dropped by 9 percent from 2001.	1998 B	1999 B+	2000 B+	2001 B
		2002 B			

Grade: A: excellent • B: moderately well • C: average • D: potential failure • F: failing

SOURCE: The Southern California Association of Governments

we willing to step up and pay for some of the things that need to be done to improve our quality of life?"

The report said the poor grades for 2002 also reflect broader problems in Southern California: The loss of middle-class jobs, a population fast outgrowing the region's infrastructure, and poor educational resources to help low-wage earners and their children climb the economic ladder.

Southern California added 33,000 residents in 2002, a boom that continued from 2001, when the region's population grew at a rate not seen since 1950. Homegrown births accounted for half of the new residents, and foreign immigrants accounted for 41 percent of the increase.

The region saw unemployment numbers rise, a net loss of 22,000 jobs and a decline in per capita personal income. Especially troubling, officials said, is that one in five children in the region lives in poverty.

Yet Southern California still weathered the national economic downturn better than most of the state, especially the San Francisco Bay Area.

Manufacturers, publishers, Internet-related businesses and the motion picture industry were the hardest hit. On the rise were retail, real estate-related businesses and government jobs, thanks to new teacher spots.

Jack Kyser, chief economist of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp., said the region is beginning to create new well-paying jobs in 2004, particularly in the aerospace industry, which has gotten new government contracts.

But regional leaders need to focus on creating jobs for the middle class.

"When anyone thinks of economic development in Southern California, it's always couched in retail," Kyser said. "Too many leaders think all the manufacturers have gone away or say we

can't compete with China."

To house the booming population, builders pulled permits for 68,000 new units, the largest increase since 1990. Low mortgage rates have fueled home sales but also pushed up the sticker price.

Regionwide, single-family homes make up 70 percent of new building permits. However in Los Angeles, where a house, driveway, back yard and orange tree have been central to postwar culture, apartments make up 60 percent of new building permits.

The American dream of homeownership became more elusive in 2002 with 69 percent of households in Los Angeles County unable to afford a median-price home of roughly \$300,000. In Orange County only 22 percent of households could afford a median-price home.

In the Inland Empire — booming because it's the last bastion of affordable housing in Southern California — 43 percent of households can buy a median-price home, down from 48 percent in 2001.

However, there's a big downside to the housing construction boom.

"It's not just if housing is being built, it's where it's being built and how close to jobs," said professor Stuart Gabriel, director of the Lusk Center for Real Estate at the University of

Southern California. "People are finding affordable housing in outlying areas but haven't found jobs out there."

That leads to long commutes, more cars on the road idling in traffic and more air pollution.

Southern California's air quality grade took a drop in 2002, due in large part to an increase in smoggy days. There were 49 days in the summer of 2002 that exceeded the national health standard for ozone, the key ingredient in smog. That's compared with 36 days in 2001.

The 2003 grade will likely be even worse because there were 63 days above the national health standard.

The report points to poor weather systems, growth in the Inland Empire and Southern Californians driving more trucks and SUVs.

South Coast Air Quality Management District officials say the especially hot and stagnant weather is partly to blame but that the region clearly must do more to cut pollution from vehicles, which makes up 75 percent of the ozone problem.

"Is this a significant drop in quality of life? We hope it's just a blip," said AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood.

Southern California's education grade remains low and SCAG officials took heart that schools didn't get worse. Eighth-graders in all counties

except Orange and Ventura still perform below the national median in reading and math. In all counties, less than 40 percent of high school students take the courses needed to get into the University of California and California State University systems, which are major steppingstones to improving their quality of life.

The public safety grade also stayed the same, although the violent crime rate dropped 3 percent from 2001 and juvenile felony arrests dropped by 9 percent.

"I was thinking when I looked at the grades that if the Southern California region was a state, we'd probably recall the governor," quipped Riverside Mayor Ronald Loveridge.

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